

# Searching for “Strategy” in Japan’s Foreign Aid

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## Introduction

The notion of a linkage between Japan’s official development assistance and national security strategy is not a new idea. Since its inception Japanese aid has been given with an eye to the achievement of foreign, economic, and international security policy goals, especially promotion of Japanese exports and support of the western alliance system. Japanese aid officials, however, carefully avoided using the term “strategic aid” (Orr, 1989, 80–83; Inada 1989).

Much has changed since then. Richard Samuels (2007), among others, has detailed the Japanese government’s search for a foreign policy grand strategy to replace the postwar Yoshida Doctrine which was based on unequal alliance with United States, a commitment to a particular version of pacifism, and reliance on economic instruments of foreign policy (Hughes 2015). Since 2000 Japanese leaders openly speak of strategy and security. Prime Minister Abe’s formulation of a “proactive contribution to international peace” is a culmination of a two-decade debate on this new grand strategy. Changes in defense policy have been most prominent, with increasingly permissive rules for Self-Defense Force dispatch to post-conflict situations and support for American military operations during the Koizumi administration (2001–2006) paving the way for upgrade of the Japan Defense Agency to full ministry status in 2006 and enactment of a security law in 2015 to effect the second Abe administration’s reinterpretation of Article 9 of the constitution allowing collective self-defense and support of “important friendly countries” in the event of hostilities deemed to threaten Japan’s national interest.

In this context aid policy is changing as well. Among the changes are calls from inside and outside the Japanese government for a clearer “aid strategy” or the promotion of “strategic aid.” This research note investigates Japanese government understandings of the terms strategy and strategic by examining the frequency and usage of key words and phrases related to them are used in key documents on official development assistance policy.

### 1. Literature review and problem specification

A significant problem encountered in researching this idea of aid strategy and strategic aid is that the terms “strategy” and “strategic” have multiple meanings. Thomas Schelling’s (1960/1966, p. 5)

classic offers two definitions: “the efficient application of force” and “exploitation of potential force”, both within the context of conflict and military conflict in particular. This is problematic for multiple reasons in the Japanese case. Strategy is used widely to mean simply the pursuit of diplomatic or other foreign policy goals by means of aid allocation; to mean the substitution of foreign aid for traditional security instruments (Yasutomo, 1986); alliance support (Yasutomo, 1986; Hook, 1995); use of aid in pursuit of geopolitical goals such as support for strategically important countries (Inada 1989; Farris 2010); or to counter security threats to the nation (Cronin and Ghani 2007; Yamamoto 2017). “Strategic” is also invoked simply as a substitute for “active” (Solis and Urata 2007). Strategic aid in the American case is usually understood in terms of the allocation of economic or military assistance to geopolitically important recipients (for example, Guess 1987/2011; Callaway and Matthews 2008). Too frequently, the term is simply implied or left undefined (Yoshimatsu and Trinidad 2011).

Based on a review of the literature the author posits the following typology of use of the terms strategy and strategic in the context of official development assistance: 1) aid as a support for pursuit of traditional security goals; 2) aid as an instrument to achieve geopolitical goals; 3) aid formulated with clear long-term goals, developmental or otherwise, and organizational and budgetary resources allocated to achieve them; or 4) policies and actions for whatever purposes labelled as strategies.

Another way to consider the problem is to think of aid strategy or strategic aid in terms of two frameworks. One is organizing and thinking strategically. Aid policy has tended to serve different purposes and to be differently organized over time (Lancaster, 2007). Japan has been no exception. At the end of the Cold War Alan Rix (1993) argued that the decentralized organization of Japan’s aid system prevented the articulation of a coherent aid philosophy that would guide aid policies and allow Japan to play a more active leadership role in the international aid architecture. A decade later Saori Katada (2004) had identified a consolidation of aid philosophy that contained elements of humanitarian concern and consideration of the national interest. It is possible, therefore, that discussions of “strategy” in aid policy circles are concerned with issues of how to organize the aid policy making system to facilitate linkages between overarching goals (whatever they might be) and specific policies and agencies.

A second framework is to think in terms of allocating strategically. Given overarching policy priorities, is aid allocated by country or sector in order to accomplish those priorities?

## 2. Methodology

This research attempts to clarify what policy makers mean by “strategy” and “strategic” when they employ those terms in the context of foreign aid. Specifically, this research investigated uses of the terms “strategy”, “aid strategy,” and “strategic aid” in official documents related to Japanese foreign aid: the three ODA Charters (ODA 大綱 1992, 2003, 2015); the 2010 final report of an advisory council on ODA basic policy sponsored by the Japan Democratic Party; and the 2013 National Security Strategy (国家安全保障戦略) adopted by the Abe administration; the official development assistance white papers published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (我が国の政府開発援助(総論)・政府開

発援助白書・国際協力白書); and the Diplomatic Bluebook (外交青書), also published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. First, a word search for “strategy” and “strategic” was conducted. In addition, word searches for “security” and “national interest” were conducted on the assumption that strategy is conducted in the service of both. Wording indicating the national interest but which do not use the term directly was included in the latter count. Finally, a word search for “visible aid” (顔が見える ODA), a term that emerged in the 1990s reflecting concerns about the foreign policy impact of aid, was conducted.

The complete text of each aid charter was covered. However, the white papers are divided into two parts: discussion of overall aid policy and largely statistical presentation of the year’s aid. The research therefore concentrated on the former. In the case of the diplomatic bluebooks only those sections that directly dealt with aid were investigated.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 ODA Charters

Tables 1–4 present the results of the survey. Table 1 shows counts for security-related keywords from the 1992, 2003, and 2015 ODA charters and the 2010 DPJ draft. While this article is mostly concerned with the use of the terms strategy and national interest, related keywords from previous research (Potter Seminar 2017) are included for reference.

Table 1: Keyword Counts by ODA Charter

keyword	1992	2003	2010	2015
Human security	na	2	8*	4
Security	0	2	7	3
Peace	5	11	14	42*
Strategy	0	4	19*	8
National interest	0	0	2	3

Source: revised from Potter Seminar 2017.

The relationship between the ODA charters and the concern about strategic aid after 2000 is clear. The first charter was adopted in August 1992, at a time when Japan was emerging as the largest bilateral aid donor and the question of Japan’s aid leadership and the perceived need to develop a clearer aid doctrine were acute issues. Over time, reformulations have included specific references to “strategy.” The 1992 charter did not include the term, but strategy or its variants appear four times in the 2003 revision and eight times in the 2015 Development Cooperation Charter. It appears 19 times in the Democratic Party’s 2010, *“Hirakareta Kokueki no Tame ni”*, a document that would have formed the core of a revised charter had the party stayed in power past 2012. Similarly, “national interest” or variants of the term do not appear in the first two charters but do in the latter two.

The term strategy is used in various ways. In the 2003 charter, for example, one finds reference to “increasing (aid’s) strategic implementation to achieve a variety of basic aims that focus on the developmental aspects of aid; “development strategy”; and strategic prioritization of Asia as a key aid region. The 2010 DPJ draft refers to it more frequently than any other charter but without consistent meaning.

Security is presented in two ways in the charters. Note that the table separates “security”, by which is meant Japan’s security, and “human security”, a term that has both developmental and traditional security connotations (Amakasu and Potter 2016). The original charter never mentions security. The term “security” is not used directly in either the 2003 or 2015 charter, rather the reference is to “Japan’s own peace and prosperity” as a rationale for giving aid. “Hirakareta Kokueki no Tame ni” refers to human security and “peace and prosperity” about equally. The dual usage of these terms in the aid white papers and diplomatic bluebooks is investigated below.

### 3.2 White papers

Tables 2 and 3 present the data culled from the Foreign Ministry’s annual white papers on ODA. The tables are separated because of the change in title: *Waga Kuni no Seifu Kaihatsu Enjo* became *Seifu Kaihatsu Enjo Hakusho* from fiscal year 2001. It retains that title along with another, *Kokusai Kyouryoku Hakusho*, introduced in the 2007 edition and retained thereafter.

Table 2: Keywords by year, *Waga Kuni no Seifu Kaihatsu Enjo*, 1989–2001

	strategy	security	national interest	visible aid
1989	3	0	1	0
1990	2	0	0	0
1991	0	1*	0	0
1992	3	0	0	0
1993	0	0	0	0
1994	2	1	0	3
1995	1	2	2	1
1996	9	4	0	1
1997	24	11	6	1
1998	15	0	2	1
1999	4	2	1	6
2000	18	7	1	1

Source: *Waga Kuni no Seifu Kaihatsu Enjo*, 1989–2001; data compiled by author

Table 3: Keywords by year, *Seifu Kaihatsu Enjo Hakusho*, 2002–2014

	strategy	security	national interest	visible aid
2001	9	6	1	8
2002	31	24	4	0
2003	34	40	0	0
2004	20	18	1	0
2005	4	*	1	0
2006	15	11	1	1
2007	7	21	6	0
2008	1	3	1	0
2009	7	5	2	0
2010	9	3	3	0
2011	6	10	2	2
2012	4	4	2	0
2013	8	3	2	1
2014	4	15	1	

Source: *Seifu Kaihatsu Enjo Hakusho*, 2002–2014; data compiled by author

### 3.2.1 Strategy

The data in the tables make it clear that the term strategy is used with increasing regularity over time beginning with the mid-1990s. The term is used most in the white papers during two periods, 1997–1998 and 2002–2004. The first period overlaps the prime ministership of Hashimoto Ryutaro and the second the first term of Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro. Over time, moreover, the meanings associated with the term have broadened. In the white papers from 1989 to 1997 “strategy” is exclusively used in the context of “development strategy” or “debt strategy,” referring to DAC debates at the time. While development strategy remains in later white papers phrasing such as “implementation of aid based on a strategic perspective” (1999, 2000), references to certain regions’ strategic significance (Africa in 1998); using aid strategically to support important sectors and recipients or to downgrade recipients for strategic reasons (China in the 2004 and 2005 white papers, for example).

The 2005 white paper is the first to use the term strategy in a geopolitical sense in the context of supporting geopolitically strategic countries (Afghanistan and Iraq), alliance maintenance, or to hedge against geopolitical rivals (China). The 2006 white paper, published during the period when the government was promoting its Arc of Freedom and Prosperity policy, is frank about linking aid and geopolitical strategy. Pages 54–56 of that document draws a clear link between “strategy” and geographic and sectoral allocations of aid (Gaimusho 2007, pp. 54–56). At the same time, strategy in

the 2005 white paper is invoked to mean conformity between the 2003 aid charter and aid policy, a theme taken up again in the 2007 white paper and its concern for centralizing basic aid policy decision making in the Cabinet. Subsequent white papers (2010, 2012) use the term in both ways.

Finally, the author identified a number of white papers throughout the period that refer to development or foreign policies that carry the name “strategy” or to councils that bear that name.

### 3.2.2 Security

The term “security” does not appear in the white papers until the mid-1990s. The 1991 white paper, written against the backdrop of the recent Gulf War and an impending UN peacekeeping operation in Cambodia, still tries to avoid direct references to security, preferring “peace and prosperity” (counted in table 2) or “peace and stability” (not counted). It is invoked frequently in the white papers after 2000, especially during the administrations of Koizumi Junichiro and Abe Shinzo. As with the aid charters security is used both in the context of traditional security and human security. Thus, the earliest reference to security in the dataset (1994) uses the term “comprehensive security,” a Cold War formulation first articulated by the Ohira Masayoshi government. The following year “human security” was first used, as was “national security.” The 1996 white paper referred to security in its traditional sense, energy security, Cold War security, and ASEAN Regional Forum security. Thereafter, security is used in both senses in most white papers with references to human security being numerically greater until 2005.

The last half of the 2000s appear to reflect a debate within the government about which security conception should predominate. The 2005 white paper, which was devoted to a midterm review of the Millennium Development Goals and refers exclusively to human security (the number of references was completely out of line with other white papers, hence the asterisk in the table). The 2006 white paper, on the other hand, was unusually frank in its concern about geopolitical issues and traditional security at the expense of references to human security. The 2007 white paper, on the other hand, refers almost exclusively to human security. The 2009 and 2010 white papers, produced under Democratic Party of Japan governments, uses it exclusively. Thereafter, the earlier pattern is partially restored.

### 3.2.3 National interest

Like strategy and security, references to the national interest become prominent in the mid-1990s, with the 1997 white paper marking the high point. Thereafter it occurs in nearly every version. Usage varies, however: some white papers use the term national interest (国益) directly, others use the term peace and prosperity (我が国の平和と繁栄) with slight variations among different editions.

### 3.2.4 Visible Aid

“Visible aid” was included in the keyword search as proxy for foreign policy considerations. It appears in white papers throughout the period but references cluster in the late 1990s. This period marked the onset of a continuous decline in aid budgets in which questions of the diplomatic and reputational payoff of providing aid was in open question. Interestingly, there are a few mentions of a

rather awkward neologism, “mieruka” (見える化), which appears both during the period of Democratic Party government (including the 2010 “Hirakareta Kokueki no Tame ni”) and the second Abe government.

### 3.3 Gaikou Seisho

Table 4 presents the results of a shorter search of the Diplomatic Bluebook (Gaikou Seisho). The bluebooks cover foreign policy well beyond official development assistance, so only the sections on aid *per se* were searched. Moreover, the search focused on references to strategy and security.

Table 4: Keywords in *Gaikou Seisho*, 2002–2013

	strategy	security
2002	1	1
2003	3	3
2004	1	6
2005	5	2
2006	2	6
2007	4	7
2008	1	5
2010	1	4
2011	5	4
2012	0	9
2013	7	12

Source: *Gaikou Seisho*, 2002–2013; data compiled by author

#### 3.3.1 Strategy

Consistent with the results reported from the white papers the term strategy appears in the official development sections of the bluebook in almost every year after 2002.

#### 3.3.2 Security

As with strategy, security appears in the relevant sections of the bluebook every year after 2002. Unlike the white papers, however, references are almost exclusively to human security in the sections devoted to official development assistance.

### 3.4 National Security Strategy (2013) and Impact on White Papers

The National Security Strategy (国家安全保障戦略), adopted in December 2013, is concerned with security in the traditional sense. The Strategy specifies guidelines for all aspects of foreign policy

related to national security, “including sea, outer space, cyberspace, official development assistance (ODA) and energy” (National Security Strategy 2013, 2). ODA, therefore, is defined as an instrument of security policy. The new International Cooperation Charter, adopted by the cabinet in February 2015 is based on the National Security Strategy (Ohashi 2016, 340).

Usage of the terms strategy and strategic reflects both understandings of security. On page 26 the document calls for the strategic use of aid seamlessly with “security-related fields” (with a reference to United Nations peace-keeping operations in the following paragraph). Two pages later, in “Responding to Global Development and Global Issues and Realizing Human Security” the Strategy refers to “strategic and effective” use of aid to achieve human security and the development objectives of the MDGs and the SDGs.

## Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War there have been calls from inside and outside the Japanese government for a clearer “aid strategy” or the promotion of “strategic aid.” This research note investigated Japanese government understandings of the terms strategy and strategic by examining the frequency and usage of key words and phrases related to them are used in key documents on official development assistance policy. The research found that the word strategy and related keywords security and national interest have been used with increasing regularity in annual white papers, aid charters, and diplomatic bluebooks. This usage, moreover, has become increasingly varied. To return to the typologies suggested in the section on problem specification above: 1) reference to military strategy or traditional security; 2) the achievement of geopolitical goals; 3) the rational application of policies to hierarchically ordered policy preferences; 4) specific policy initiatives given the label of “strategy” or “strategic”; 5) organizing and thinking strategically; 6) allocating aid to strategically important countries and sectors. Thus, the term has taken on geopolitical and traditional security tones since 2000, especially after 2006, but it has also taken on other connotations. Pinning down “strategy” in Japanese official development assistance remains elusive.

## Notes

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